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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 13th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. HAMBURGER (Netherlands)

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The meeting was called to order at 11 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 97: ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (continued) (A/51/3 (Part II), A/51/87, A/51/131, A/51/208-S/1996/543, A/51/210, A/51/211-S/1996/551, A/51/295, A/51/357, A/51/462-S/1996/831 and A/51/375)

(a) IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT (continued) (A/51/3 (Part II), A/51/76 and Add.1, A/51/510)

(b) SPECIAL SESSION FOR THE PURPOSE OF AN OVERALL REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21 (continued) (A/51/420)

1. Mr. LANGLEY (New Zealand) said that Agenda 21 must be used as a yardstick to measure performance over the past five years and identify achievements together with areas where expectations had not been met. In looking to the future, one of the first factors to be addressed was the effectiveness of institutions and the relationships between them. There were diverse sustainable development priorities among nations, but all were likely to agree on the need for robust institutions to deal with environment and sustainable development issues at the international level. New Zealand was concerned by the proliferation of international bodies and processes dealing with similar issues. The special session for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21 must explore how to improve the performance of the Commission on Sustainable Development as the key political forum for the environment and sustainable development agenda.

2. For a significant number of Member States, the Barbados Programme of Action for the Development of Small Island Developing States was the prescription for translating Agenda 21 into action and achieving sustainable development.

3. The five weeks set aside to prepare for the special session was an appropriate amount of time. The current session of the General Assembly should not attempt to place constraints on the preparatory process, but should leave the exercise of identifying issues until that process began in 1997.

4. Mr. MARQUES (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)), providing information on the World Solar Summit recently held in Harare, Zimbabwe, said that UNESCO and several other partners had initiated the preparations for the Solar Summit three years earlier in the conviction that renewable energies were relevant not only from an environmental point of view, but from a social one as well. Two of the main obstacles to the greater utilization of renewable energies were lack of information on their potential and lack of sufficient political will for their development and deployment. Consequently, preparations had begun for the holding of a world summit on solar and other renewable energies that would give new political impetus at the highest levels to their development.

5. The preparatory process for the Summit had taken an approach emphasizing implementation, inviting countries participating in the regional meetings to identify their national priorities and submit high-priority renewable energy

projects for consideration. It had soon become clear that the preparatory process required a high-level advisory body to oversee it, and the UNESCO Executive Board, at its November 1994 session, had approved the establishment of a World Solar Commission, with President Mugabe of Zimbabwe as its Chairman. The Commission was composed of 16 heads of State and Government from all regions of the world.

6. The main conclusions reached at the Summit were that renewable energies were an important component of the energy sector for the twenty-first century deserving to be developed and used on a large scale in the future. The decision was also taken to launch a World Solar Programme 1996-2005, which was expected to be completed by June of 1997.

7. Mr. MARRERO (United States of America) said that, because of disturbing environmental changes and pressures on global resources, the United States had moved environmental issues to the centre of its foreign policy. It had been active in negotiations to address greenhouse gas emissions, trade in toxic chemicals, decline in fish stocks, marine pollution from land-based activities and deforestation and desertification. His delegation joined others in seeking greater effectiveness on the part of the international institutions responsible for the environment and sustainable development. The role of the Commission on Sustainable Development as a high-level political forum must be confirmed, while the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) should be ratified as the institution responsible for environmental policy development, scientific analysis, monitoring and assessment.

8. While the implementation of Agenda 21 was not as rapid as many would like, a critical new understanding of the concept of sustainable development had spread throughout the world, recognizing that economic growth should contain within itself the means of its own renewal, not the seeds of its own destruction. His delegation hoped that the special session of the General Assembly in 1997 would be used to expand the role of the Commission on Sustainable Development to enable it to act as the main commission of the Economic and Social Council. It should take the lead in reviewing and overseeing the integrated implementation of the results of recent United Nations conferences. The Commission had been most successful when it had looked at ways to add value to Agenda 21, for example, by bringing together national sustainable development bodies to share their experience or by identifying gaps in implementation, such as by establishing the Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Panel on Forests. In the future, the Commission should look at the environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainable development. It should shift its focus to broader cross-sectoral issues like sustainable cities, rapid population growth and high rates of consumption, and the sustainability of the world's food supply. His delegation endorsed the call for greater private-sector involvement in the activities of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

9. Mr. INSANALLY (Guyana), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said it was increasingly recognized that the Caribbean region was an area of special vulnerability, requiring special attention in order to achieve sustainable development. CARICOM countries had assumed primary responsibility, while fully conscious that the ultimate success of their efforts could only be guaranteed within a framework of international cooperation and partnership based

on the principle of common but differentiated responsibility. The CARICOM countries welcomed the positive developments in the implementation of Agenda 21, but felt that the promise of increased international cooperation had not been fulfilled.

10. General Assembly resolution 50/113 provided a firm foundation for the special session for the review of Agenda 21. That review should be as comprehensive as possible, taking into account the major conferences that had occurred since the Rio Conference. It should also include the relationship between those processes and the Agenda for Development, which would soon be completed.

11. Careful thought should be given to action beyond the review. Among priorities for action were the problems of small island developing States, the final report of the Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Panel on Forests and the search for a harmonized approach to sustainable development. The CARICOM delegations were seriously disturbed that the report of the Secretary-General on the special session for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21 (A/51/420) contained not a single reference to the Barbados Declaration and Programme of Action on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. They wished, therefore, to be assured that the Barbados Programme of Action would be dealt with in the overall assessment of progress achieved since the Rio Conference.

12. In his delegation's view, the Commission on Sustainable Development, given its mandate for the follow-up to Agenda 21, was ideally placed to prepare for the review. Broad-based participation in the review process involving all the principal actors, including, inter alia, Governments, the relevant United Nations bodies and the Global Environment Facility, was of crucial importance to its success. While not attempting to renegotiate the Agenda, the international community should fully reaffirm the compact it represented and seek to identify the practical measures necessary for its implementation.

13. The single most important impediment to progress in sustainable development had been the failure to provide for the transfer of appropriate technology and additional financial resources to developing countries. Unless they were forthcoming, little change could be expected. His delegation therefore looked forward to the replenishment of the Global Environment Facility and urged developed countries to honour the commitments made in Rio and increase their assistance flows to developing countries to enable them to fulfil their obligations under Agenda 21.

14. Mr. M'MELLA (Kenya) said that, in view of his Government's belief that the integration of environmental policies into national development strategies was an essential component for sustainable socio-economic and human development, it had ratified all the three major conventions that had been prepared pursuant to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. Kenya continued to endorse the critical role that the international community, through United Nations agencies and organizations, played in the affairs and well-being of mankind, particularly in endeavouring to solve environmental problems. In that connection, as the host country of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Kenya was seriously concerned at the alarming decline in contributions

to that agency's voluntary and trust funds. Should such trends be allowed to continue, they would have a crippling effect on the activities and programmes of UNEP, and would tarnish the credibility of the commitment that the heads of State and Government had made at the Rio Conference. He therefore appealed to all Member States not only to contribute to the environment fund but also to make every effort to ensure the strengthening of the headquarters of UNEP and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) pursuant to the relevant General Assembly resolutions. He also hoped that, pursuant to the UNEP Governing Council's decision in 1995, United Nations Headquarters would make available the necessary administrative and support funds for certain services at UNEP, as was the case with other United Nations headquarters in Vienna and Geneva. In his delegation's view, United Nations and donor funds should be utilized to hold most meetings related to environmental issues at UNEP headquarters.

15. His delegation welcomed and supported the need to convene a special session of the General Assembly for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21. In that connection, his delegation was seriously concerned about the alarming deterioration in the environment, which could lead to a holocaust if left unchecked. Since such an environmental holocaust would affect countries of the North and South alike, it behoved the entire international community to marshal every iota of political will to address the pressing universal environmental concerns for the benefit of present and future generations. The world's resources should be used to fulfil the expectations of all its peoples. To that end, technological advances in the developed countries should be made available to all actors so that they could adequately address environmental problems.

16. Ms. AMOAH (Ghana) said that sustainable development was the only means through which future generations could benefit from resources currently available that were being used for development. Her Government, in accordance with the commitments entered into at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, had undertaken measures such as the establishment of a national environmental policy and a national environmental action plan, aimed at ensuring the sound management of natural resources and the environment. The environmental policy sought to reconcile economic development with natural resource conservation and to make the high quality of the environment a key element in supporting the country's economic and social development. Her Government had also established a Ministry of Environment, Science and Technology in its effort to use science and technology as a tool for development, while maintaining the integrity of the environment. However, those efforts had been constrained by weak national institutions, by the lack of technical and expert personnel and by inadequate financial resources.

17. In that regard, the 1997 special session of the General Assembly should look at how developing countries could be assisted in the area of capacity-building, and in strengthening the role of science and technology for sound environmental and natural resource management. Furthermore, the session should review the issue of financial resources to developing countries and give serious consideration to the matter of unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, in view of the serious threat posed to the environment by market-

driven mass consumption. The question of indicators for measuring the implementation of Agenda 21 should also be considered.

18. Archbishop MARTINO (Observer for the Holy See) said that human beings were central to any discussions on the environment and development. That had been confirmed by the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and Agenda 21, which had given impetus to the movement to turn the world towards a system of renewal and sustainability, and away from patterns of selfish consumption. Unfortunately, as the world prepared to enter the new millennium, the light that had guided that movement seemed to have faded.

19. True to its mission, the Holy See wished to help the world community recognize the need to give due consideration to the ethical dimensions of problems affecting developing countries. In working out equitable access to resources, important issues of justice must be taken into account. In that connection, developing countries, especially the least developed ones, must be empowered to take part in the world economy, while women must be empowered to have equal opportunities in the economic and developmental programmes of their countries. Furthermore, present needs should be met without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to fulfil their own needs. In that regard, fundamental rights and freedoms, including the right to development, must be safeguarded. Access to information and technologies for trade and the creation of an enabling environment were essential to that process. The understanding of the relationship between the environment and sustainable development, coupled with the call by the Rio Conference for an authentic, durable and widespread change of habits and attitudes, especially in industrialized countries, would create a pattern for development that was not only environmentally and socially sustainable, but also equitably distributed with the human person as its central focus.

20. Mrs. ESTHYPROBO (Indonesia) said her delegation was seriously concerned that the implementation of the commitments entered into at the Rio Conference had fallen far short of expectations. The commitment of the developed countries to ensure an adequate flow of financial resources and the transfer of environmentally sound technology, which were crucial in order for the developing countries to implement Agenda 21, had been left unfulfilled. The Global Environment Facility, which had been expected to be a principal mechanism for financing efforts to protect the environment, had also fallen short of expectations. As a result, many developing countries had no alternative but to reallocate already overstretched resources in order to implement the provisions of Agenda 21. Such an alternative was not viable over the long term.

21. She supported the view that the special session should not reopen Agenda 21 and other intergovernmental agreements in the field of sustainable development. Rather, it should identify the critical constraints blocking the implementation of Agenda 21 at the national, regional and international levels. Innovative ways must be sought for nations and peoples to implement their commitments to advance the objectives of sustainable development. In that connection, the Commission on Sustainable Development should undertake an in-depth evaluation of progress achieved and identify major concerns and gaps. The international community must not allow the promise of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development to go unfulfilled.

22. Mr. BAISHEV (Kazakstan) said that Kazakstan's environmental problems, which had assumed global proportions, included the ecological consequences of nuclear testing at the former Semipalatinsk nuclear test site and the problems of the Aral and Caspian seas. Between 1949 and 1989, 459 nuclear explosions, including 113 in the atmosphere, had been conducted at the Semipalatinsk test site. On 29 August 1991, the test site had been closed. The situation in the areas affected by nuclear testing had been assessed and, on the basis of the data collected, the Government of Kazakstan had declared all districts of Semipalatinsk region and a number of districts in Pavlodar, Karaganda and Vostochny Kazakstan regions to be environmental disaster areas. A programme had been developed to reduce radiation levels in those areas, and it was expected that its implementation would be completed by 2005. However, additional research conducted by Kazakstan's National Nuclear Centre together with scientists and specialists from the United States of America, France, the Russian Federation and experts of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) had indicated that the radiological situation at the test site was more dangerous than had been supposed.

23. Since 1960, the Aral Sea had lost 75 per cent of its volume and 50 per cent of its area. The Sea had receded over 100 to 120 kilometres, leaving in its wake an environmental disaster over a territory of more than 33,000 square kilometres. That had led to the increased degradation and desertification of lands adjacent to the Aral region. Of the 178 animal species that had existed in the deltas, only 38 remained. The increased mineralization of the sea water had almost completely destroyed the fish fauna. The unfavourable environment had caused serious health problems among the population.

24. The countries of the Aral Sea basin had committed themselves to pursuing a strategy of sustainable development and environmental improvement in the affected regions. With the support of such international organizations as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank, Kazakstan and the other Central Asian countries had begun to develop national plans of action to protect the environment. Kazakstan was grateful to UNDP, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Bank for their programmes to rehabilitate the Aral Sea area; those programmes should be implemented more actively. His delegation wished to convey its special thanks to the countries that had provided donor assistance to Kazakstan, and hoped that Kazakstan's environmental problems would continue to attract the attention of donor countries.

25. His delegation welcomed and supported the General Assembly resolution 50/113 on the convening of a special session of the Assembly to review and appraise the implementation of Agenda 21, and hoped that the session would adopt constructive decisions on environmental problems, including the problems of Kazakstan.

26. Mrs. FOX-PRZEWORSKI (United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)) said that, in addition to calling for an enhanced and strengthened role for UNEP, Agenda 21 had reaffirmed the policy guidance and coordination role of the UNEP Governing Council in the field of environment. Agenda 21 had also outlined a number of priority areas of action for UNEP. The Programme's organizational structure and biennial work programmes since the Rio Conference had reflected a fundamental shift from a sectoral approach to the environment to a fully

integrated strategy based on a clear assessment of needs. Sustainable development considerations were fundamental to all four major environmental challenges addressed in the UNEP work programme for the biennium 1996-1997: sustainable management and use of natural resources; sustainable production and consumption; a better environment for human health and well-being; and globalization trends and the environment. In order to support those goals, UNEP had taken measures to strengthen regional delivery of its programmes and implement a more efficient and transparent management structure.

27. The Programme's responsibilities in carrying out the functions of task manager had strengthened the coordination and policy guidance role of UNEP in specific areas: toxic chemicals, hazardous wastes, desertification, biological diversity, and atmosphere. UNEP had also made major contributions to the work programme of the Commission on Sustainable Development on freshwater, seas and oceans. The Commission had assigned to UNEP an important role in such areas as trade and environment, sustainable consumption and production, the development and transfer of environmentally sound technologies, integrated management of land resources (especially forests), sustainable management of biotechnology, development of indicators of sustainable development and information for decision-making.

28. The integration of sustainable development into the Programme's work had been reinforced by its activities in support of international environmental conventions, its role in the Global Environment Facility (GEF), as well as the expressed needs and priorities of Governments. UNEP had also contributed to the outcomes of other major United Nations conferences that had been held since the Rio Conference in 1992.

29. At its eighteenth session in May 1995, the UNEP Governing Council had re-emphasized the need for UNEP, in accordance with its mandate and in implementation of Agenda 21, to continue to provide effective support to the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development as the high-level policy forum for the discussions to follow up the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

30. In recognition of the fact that approximately 80 per cent of all marine pollution was caused by human activities on land, in 1996 UNEP had organized the Washington Conference, which had adopted the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities. The draft implementation plan had been prepared in close consultation with Governments, the relevant United Nations agencies, secretariats of the Programme's Regional Seas Programme and other regional bodies, and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

31. The draft General Assembly resolution prepared by Governments at the latest session of the Commission on Sustainable Development called on UNEP to take expeditious action to provide for the establishment and implementation of the clearing-house mechanism. At the global level, the clearing-house mechanism would be structured around organizations responsible for source categories. That should ensure access to the body of international scientific and technical information as well as experience in that area.

32. Mrs. LEU (Observer for Switzerland) said that the General Assembly's special session to review and appraise the implementation of Agenda 21 would make it possible to assess the progress that had been made in the area of sustainable development and to determine the additional efforts required for the implementation of that ambitious goal. Her delegation hoped that the special session would provide a clear and credible political message regarding future action.

33. Her delegation considered that, after 1997, the Commission on Sustainable Development should continue to play a coordinating role and provide a forum for discussions on policy guidelines for sustainable development. In order to improve its work, the Commission should concentrate its efforts on the priority themes or sectors that would be established by the General Assembly at its special session. The Commission should mobilize all those involved in development - individuals, communities and representatives of productive sectors - while making sure that it did not duplicate work carried out in other forums. In that regard, her delegation wished to reaffirm its support for the current system of task managers as well as the preparation of national reports. The idea of establishing regional reports was worth considering.

34. In order for the Commission to retain its political role, greater emphasis should be placed on social and economic issues, including trade and environment, the status of women in society, management of natural resources with respect to energy and transport, evolution of production practices and patterns of consumption, and the social dimension of sustainable development.

35. Within the Commission, her delegation had taken part in the discussion on forests. In its view, the Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) had helped establish a constructive dialogue on questions related to the sustainable management of forested areas. That dialogue should be continued in a high-level political forum, the exact form and mandate of which should be discussed at the Panel's fourth session.

36. As a mountainous country, Switzerland had insisted on the inclusion of chapter 13, concerning the sustainable development of mountains, in Agenda 21. A series of regional round tables and other activities had strengthened awareness of the importance of the sustainable development of mountainous areas. Switzerland would commit additional financial and other resources to facilitate the implementation of Agenda 21 for that purpose.

37. Mr. DE MOURA (Brazil), speaking on behalf of the countries members of the Common Market of the Southern Cone (MERCOSUR) and Chile and Bolivia, said that desertification affected more than just a limited number of countries; it was a global problem. For that reason, sustainable development with respect to soil use called for coordinated efforts on the part of the entire international community. In that respect, the speedy implementation of an international convention to combat desertification was of great importance.

38. The special session of the General Assembly for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21 would have a major impact on environmental conservation and preservation and required the support of both the developed and the developing countries, the United Nations system

and civil society, especially non-governmental organizations and the private sector.

39. The commitments made at the Rio Conference had not advanced much beyond rhetoric. International cooperation, the mainstay of Agenda 21, had been negatively affected by reduced levels of official development assistance (ODA) and, in general, international funds to support sustainable development activities were extremely scarce.

40. There was an obvious imbalance in the implementation of sustainable development. On the one hand, sustainability was gaining support in the developing countries while, on the other, it was losing ground in the developed world. The countries members of MERCOSUR and Chile and Bolivia were convinced nevertheless that the developing and the developed countries, with support from the United Nations, would be able to find the necessary synergy, by the time of the special session in June 1997, to ensure the success of the process begun in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

41. The review of Agenda 21 should concentrate on the most relevant objectives, including the evaluation of progress made since 1992; the identification of areas in which significant progress had not been made; the revival of the "spirit of Rio" with respect to the current negotiations on the multilateral agenda concerning the environment; and the establishment of clear priorities in the future programme of work of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

42. Topics that should be included in the discussions of the special session of the General Assembly included: international cooperation in the area of finance and technology; consideration of the crucial role of the private sector with a view to proposing initiatives for stimulating private investment in sustainable development projects; relationship between production and energy consumption and the interaction between energy and atmosphere; international discussions on forests; the challenge of urbanization; and the strengthened role of the Commission on Sustainable Development as a political forum. The special session should have a political, technical and scientific level commensurate with the relevance of the theme of environment and development, the importance of the Rio Conference and Agenda 21. The session should conduct a realistic appraisal of the activities that had been conducted since 1992, indicating successes and failures. Finally, the session should look to the future with a constructive spirit; that required the political will to make essential changes and economic decisions to allocate resources with a view to promoting realistic objectives.

43. Mr. WEIBGEN (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)) drew the Committee's attention to a paper containing details of FAO follow-up activities to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. He noted that FAO had established a Sustainable Development Department as a focal point for its own technical departments and a liaison with external organizations. It had also become task manager for four chapters of Agenda 21.

44. In connection with chapter 10 of Agenda 21, on the planning and management of land resources, FAO activities included the development of more effective land resource planning and management frameworks, including gender-responsive advisory materials and strategies for land conservation and rehabilitation;

national resource management and the elaboration of methodologies that integrated gender and other socio-economic considerations; the improvement and strengthening of land-use information and evaluation systems; and the enhancement of institutional structures and the role of stakeholders.

45. Under chapter 11, on deforestation, FAO was active in the preparation and implementation of national forest programmes; the assessment of forest resources; the definition of criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management; and technology transfer in the areas of genetic conservation and reforestation programmes. FAO strongly supported the Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Panel on Forests and had seconded senior staff to it. FAO had chaired an informal inter-agency task force on forests, in which each United Nations agency was responsible for different programme elements and FAO itself was responsible for national forests and land-use; afforestation; reforestation and restoration of ecosystems affected by desertification or pollution; assessment of forest resources; and criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management.

46. Under chapter 13, on sustainable mountain development, FAO was sharing its task manager duties with a number of international and intergovernmental agencies.

47. In connection with the 12 interlinked sustainable agriculture and rural development programme areas contained in chapter 14, FAO activities included the establishment and implementation, together with UNDP, UNEP and the World Bank, of an Integrated Pest Management Facility; a joint study with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) on the impact of trade liberalization on sustainable agricultural and rural development; a Farmer-centred Resource Management Programme in Asia, sponsored jointly by UNDP, FAO and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), designed to improve farm production and farming systems; the formation of a global data bank network for animal genetic resources; the joint publication with UNEP of the World Watch List for Domestic Animal Diversity; and the implementation of the FAO International Scheme for Conservation and Rehabilitation of African Lands.

48. FAO was also involved, without being task manager, in implementing provisions of Agenda 21 relating to the integration of environment and development in decision-making; the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, and its secretariat; the conservation of biological diversity; the protection of oceans and coastal areas; freshwater resources; toxic chemicals; and global action for women with a view to sustainable and equitable development.

49. In conclusion, the FAO report entitled "World Agriculture: Towards 2010" addressed many issues related to Agenda 21, in particular the technical and environmental challenges to sustainable agricultural development and the potential for future agricultural growth; studies of technology reviews; the natural resource base; prevailing agricultural policies; trade liberalization; the trade-offs between the environment and agricultural development; and implications for the future. He hoped that it would be a useful contribution to the work of the special session of the General Assembly for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21.

50. Mr. TURBAY (Colombia) supported the statement delivered by the Costa Rican representative on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Positive developments following the Rio Conference had included the entry into force of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the institutional consolidation of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the establishment of the Multilateral Fund for the Implementation of the Montreal Protocol and the convening of international meetings on topics related to Agenda 21. His delegation was also encouraged by regional activities designed to implement Agenda 21 and by the fact that, at the national level, approximately 100 countries had reformed their institutional structures with a view to achieving sustainable development. He also welcomed the increased awareness of environmental issues among all sectors of civil society. Much remained to be done, however; the remaining tasks would have to be addressed by the special session of the General Assembly.

51. Despite the economic and technological difficulties it faced, Colombia had introduced sweeping legislative, institutional and administrative reforms for environmental protection. It had established a Ministry of the Environment to oversee environmental management and a National Environmental System to assist with that task at the local level. It had also implemented a plan whose centrepiece was social investment with a view to achieving sustainable human development. Many other countries of the South had implemented similar plans at both the national and regional levels, to follow up Agenda 21 and the programmes of action of the development summits. In their view, a prerequisite to sustainable development was sustained economic growth, including eradication of poverty through social investment, increased opportunities for women and adequate housing for all. In turn, the countries of the South were depending on the developed countries to transfer vital technology to them on preferential terms and to fulfil their commitment to allocate 0.7 per cent of their gross domestic product to official development assistance.

52. His delegation was convinced that the "global partnership" referred to in Agenda 21 would be strengthened by the review of the implementation of the commitments undertaken at the Rio Conference. Participation in the special session should be at the highest level; renegotiation of commitments already made should be avoided. The report to be submitted by the Secretary-General pursuant to General Assembly resolution 50/113, status reports on sectoral and multisectoral activities and national status reports on the implementation of Agenda 21 would constitute valuable inputs to the special session.

53. He hoped that the Secretary-General, in his report, would consider environmentally dangerous activities which originated in the developed countries and adversely affected the developing countries, such as the transboundary movement of toxic and hazardous wastes. The Secretary-General should also address the relationship between the United Nations development conferences and Agenda 21, with particular emphasis on poverty eradication. He should take into account the relationship between commitments to sustainable development, the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization. In formulating recommendations on future activities, he should give consideration to General Assembly resolution 50/120, which stressed that national plans and priorities should be the frame of reference for the national programming of operational activities for development within the United Nations system.

54. In conclusion, the Commission on Sustainable Development should continue to be responsible for follow-up to the Rio Conference and to contribute actively, within the framework of the Economic and Social Council, to the United Nations development conferences. His delegation appreciated the valuable assistance provided to the Commission by UNEP.

55. Ms. WALLER-HUNTER (Director, Division for Sustainable Development) thanked the Committee members for their statements, which would constitute a valuable input to the preparations for the special session. Clearly, the Committee felt strongly that the provisions of Agenda 21 should not be renegotiated, that the special session should focus on the implementation of Agenda 21, and that priority issues should emanate from the work carried out during the 1992-1996 period, including the outcomes of major conferences and follow-up to conventions. Both the Commission on Sustainable Development and the other secretariat departments were committed to ensuring the success of the review process.

56. She expressed appreciation for government-sponsored initiatives which had constituted an input to the work of the Commission, continuing a tradition which had begun during the Commission's first session. The major groups, including the private sector and, in particular, the business community, which had been issued guidelines for their participation in the work of the Commission, had also made a valuable contribution. The Commission was contemplating holding a dialogue with the major groups in order to draft a message for submission to the special session. She wished to assure Committee members that, in a desire to ensure transparency, the Commission would be available at all times to participate in informal consultations concerning its work or preparations for the special session.

57. Replying to a number of requests for clarification on how the special session would deal with the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action, she noted that the adoption of the Programme of Action itself already represented a first step in the implementation of the provisions of Agenda 21. At its fourth session, held in April 1996, the Commission had completed an initial review of the implementation, as requested by the General Assembly. That assessment would be included in the documentation submitted to the special session. Another review was scheduled to take place in 1999.

58. Replying to a request for clarification on how the special session would deal with sustainable development indicators, she said that the Commission, at its third session, had adopted a programme of work on indicators. A preliminary set of indicators linked to the chapters of Agenda 21 had been issued. Methodology sheets were available to countries which wished to use the indicators in their national planning activities or in preparing country profiles for submission to the Commission. It was hoped that the special session would give impetus to the initiative and that a full set of sustainable development indicators would be available by the year 2000.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.